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WOW REVIEW

READING ACROSS CULTURES
VOLUME I, ISSUE 2

Winter 2008
Open Theme

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WOW Review: Volume I, Issue 2

Winter 2008

Open Theme

Table of Contents

Introduction and Editor's Note	2
<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i>	3-4
<i>The Breadwinner</i>	5-6
<i>Josias, Hold the Book</i>	7-8
<i>Weedflower</i>	9-10
<i>Memories of Survival</i>	11-12
<i>Sélavi</i>	13-14
<i>Waiting for mama</i>	15-17
<i>The White Darkness</i>	18-19
<i>Beneath My Mother's Feet</i>	20-21
<i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i>	22-23

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Introduction and Editors' Note

The second issue of *WOW Reviews* invites readers to visit communities and cultures across the globe. From Japan to Haiti to Afghanistan, ten books offer opportunities to consider the authenticity of these resources in light of their classroom possibilities. Some of these books are ones selected from the WOW database because of their potential to invite young readers to explore authentic lifestyles, cultural insights, critical issues, and potential personal connections with international communities.

As you enjoy reading these reviews and reflecting on your own perceptions of the books and classroom experiences around these titles, please feel free to offer your insights. We welcome a dialogue that contributes to our understandings of issues surrounding these books and cultures.

The WOW Review committee continues its call for submissions of book reviews for upcoming issues and encourages interested contributors to read the Call for Submissions as well as visit various published reviews for the requested format. The third issue will focus on reviews of the books used in the classroom scenarios in *WOW Stories*, however, other reviews are encouraged as well as we seek to enhance international perspectives of literature shared on this site. The deadline for submissions to the third issue is January 1, 2009.

The fourth issue will focus on the theme of “Through the Eyes of a Child: Resiliency and Hope across Cultures.” This theme invites book reviews from all countries to consider how children and adolescents have been portrayed in positions of responsibility, leadership, and survival in countries across the globe. The deadline for reviews for the fourth issue is April 1, 2009.

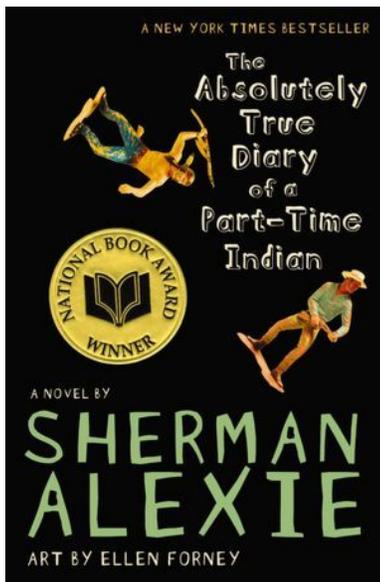
The WOW Review Committee looks forward to receiving your original reviews and comments in response to any literature reviewed in the published issues. As we work to create a community of collaborative learners, we continuously welcome reflective, respectful dialogue around both the literature and the reviews.

Janelle B. Mathis, University of North Texas, Denton, TX

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The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian

Written by Sherman Alexie
Little Brown, 2007, 230 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-316-01368-0

“I realized that I might be a lonely Indian boy, but I was not alone in my loneliness. There were millions of other Americans who had left their birthplaces in search of a dream.” (p. 217)

From Wellpinit, on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Eastern Washington, to Reardon, Washington, Arnold Spirit “Junior” must negotiate the geographical and psychological distances that exist between his Indian and White worlds. Born on the rez with a series of medical problems, Junior eventually recognizes that he has to leave the

reservation to preserve his dreams for the future. His hope is not in a reservation school that has books twenty years older than he is, and he doesn’t have hope in a system that will allow students to languish when they could thrive. Junior decides to leave the reservation for Reardon, a school over twenty miles away and a psychological distance that is much longer. It is his cross-cultural experiences and Junior’s cross-cultural identity that drive this story.

Told as a first person account, this piece of autobiographical fiction holds the reader’s interest through both humor and horror. As the character Junior negotiates what it means to be an Indian away from the reservation and an Indian who has decided to leave the rez, or as some would suggest, to become “White,” the reader is presented with the inequities that frequent reservations across the United States. Alexie creates such a strong narrative that many middle and high school students will be compelled to explore more about how such inequities can exist in school systems. The text reads quickly, chapters are driven by dialogue, and the prose is well written and accessible to young adult readers. The novel is more than storytelling—readers are drawn into the storyline and find themselves hoping that Junior will be able to work through his situation. And while Junior is a truly likable character, his situation is a stunning example of injustice laced with courage, hope, and truth. Alexie holds no punches, yet each is delivered with compassion and humor. A remarkable piece of literature, *True Diary* will stay with readers long after the last page is turned.

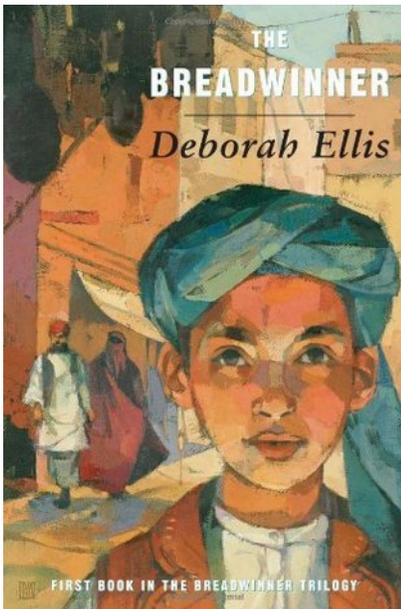
Based on incidents from the author’s own life, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* is a blending of the author’s memories and experiences growing up as a Spokane Indian. It is the author’s first text to address a younger adolescent audience, but could serve as entrée into his other texts including *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (Sherman Alexie, 2005). Coupling this text with other pieces of fiction for a unit on issues of identity and cross cultural existence could include *The Skin I’m In* (Sharon Flake, 2000) and *When I Was Puerto Rican* (Esmeralda Santiago, 2006).

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The Breadwinner

Written by Deborah Ellis

Groundwood Books, 2001, 170 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-888994-16-5

The Breadwinner, set in present day Afghanistan, is about a formerly wealthy family driven to poverty by the bombings and restrictions of the Taliban. The protagonist is an eleven-year-old girl whose Afghan father has been arrested and who decides to cut her hair and dress as a boy in order to support her remaining family. The Taliban have taken over Kabul and set curfews that require everyone to be indoors at night. Men are forced to grow beards and women and girls are forced to quit their jobs and school and stay indoors. If women go outdoors they must be accompanied by a man and wear a burqa, a covering for the entire body. Even their eyes must be behind a thick screen and girls are ordered to wear a chador, a cloth covering their

heads and shoulders. Young teen age girls are often forced into arranged marriages to strangers. Harsh punishments of amputation are carried out in public stadiums for those accused of theft. Mere survival is the way of life, while a few manage to escape to Pakistan.

This starkly realistic, emotional story is the first of four connected novels written by Deborah Ellis, a political activist. Shortly after the Taliban takeover in Kabul in 1996 she began raising money for women in refugee camps. Eventually she went to the camps and the detailed images in her books are the result of her interactions with women in the camps. She interviewed them about their lives in the camps and before the war, originally planning to write a book for adults. Ellis met a woman in the camp whose young daughter was still in Afghanistan pretending to be a boy to work and support her family. The idea was sparked and Ellis knew she had to write a children's book inspired by this girl. Unsure in the beginning as to whether children would understand the book, she was pleased to hear from those using her book how hungry children are to learn about the world and the lives of other children. The courage, hope and resiliency of the Afghan children in this book are an inspiration to all children. In an interview with Andrea Maxworthy O'Brien for CCBC Ellis states, "They are capable of understanding very complex things that are happening in the world and they are hungry for it as well."

After *The Breadwinner*, Ellis wrote three more books as she continued to bring the face of the reality for Afghan children to other children in the world. Her books have been translated into seventeen languages. Her books share a compassion and admiration of children who must assume so much responsibility at such a young age. The other books that followed *The Breadwinner* are *Parvana's Journey*, and *Mud City*. These titles provide further insights and discussion for readers around a global situation that continues to be in the forefront of the news. The hope and resiliency of children as seen in these stories may also be compared to that of other novels such as *Under the Persimmon Tree* by Suzanne Fisher Staples (2005) and *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* by Ibtisam Barakat (2007). Ellis also has written a book for adults based on her experiences in the camps, *Women of the Afghan War*. During her experiences in Afghanistan Ellis met many women

and heard their stories while she herself lived in fear of car bombings, robberies and attacks. Her compassion for these women and girls has led to her writing in hopes that the world will know and understand what these women must endure.

All the royalties from the book *The Breadwinner* are donated to Women for Women in Afghanistan in a special effort to ensure education for the girls in refugee camps in Pakistan.

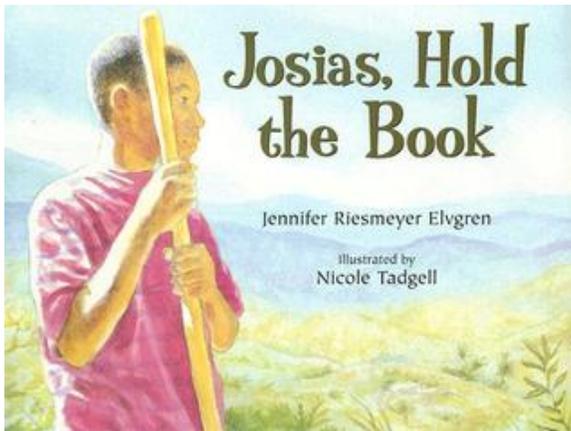
O'Brien, Andrea Maxworthy. The Power of One Voice [Electronic Version]. CCBC A Library of the School of Education, retrieved on 10/10/2008

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Josias, Hold the Book

Written by Jennifer Riesmeyer Elvgren

Illustrated by Nicole Tadgell

Boyd's Mills, 2006,

ISBN: 1-59078-318-2

Josias spends his days tending his family's garden in rural Haiti while the friends he plays soccer with in the evening attend school. Every day, when his friends invite him to "hold the book" with them, Josias explains that he has no time for school because everyone in his family has a

responsibility and his is to grow the food to feed them. One season, though, the plants will not grow. Josias tries giving them extra water and more donkey dung but nothing works. Finally, he asks his friend Chrislove to explain the problem to his teacher at school and find out if there are answers in any books. Chrislove returns and shows Josias a book that explains how the Haitian soil is tired and he should try rotating his plants. Josias is faced with the dilemma of needing to learn to read but also needing to work in the garden to feed his family. He talks to his parents about it and, when Josias offers to tend the garden instead of playing soccer in the evening, his parents agree he can go to school and "hold the book."

This moving well-written story offers possibilities for rich discussions on the importance of reading and education, dedication to family, and faithfulness to responsibilities, at the cost of personal sacrifice. Set in rural Haiti where there is poverty and fewer possibilities for attending school, the book helps readers appreciate the lives they have and the education they receive. Elvgren includes an Author's Note that provides information about the social and economic life in Haiti today and typical school experiences for children.

Tadgell's illustrations follow the text closely. The illustrations are double-page spreads in warm watercolors that depict the hot climate and environment. Though the heat results in sparse vegetation in the fields, the beauty of the Haitian countryside is also evident in the illustrations. Josias's sincere efforts to find solutions to his problem come through clearly in his facial expressions, adding depth to his character.

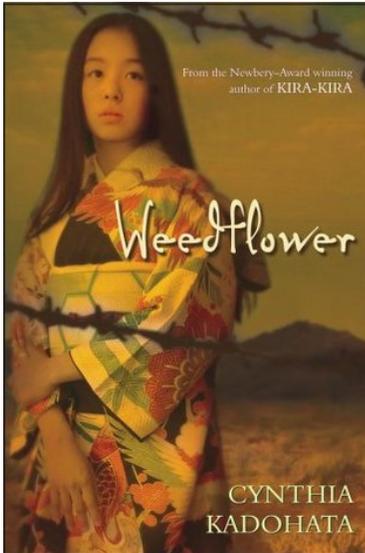
In a text set on Haiti, this book would work well with *Sélavi, That is Life: A Haitian Story of Hope* (Youme Landowne, 2004), the story of homeless children who work together to survive. This text set could also include *Running the Road to ABC* (Denize Lauture, 1996), which depicts Haitian children running through the countryside to and from school. To show the importance and value of schooling and education, *Josias, Hold the Book* could be paired with *Freedom School, Yes!* (Amy Littlesugar, 2001), the story of an African American girl who learns the value of education during the Civil Rights era.

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Weedflower

Written by Cynthia Kadohata
Atheneum, 2006, 257 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-689-86574-9

“As they walked more and more people joined them. About a thousand Nikkei waited with their possessions at the gate. Hundreds of others had gathered to watch them leave.” (p. 96)

A historical novel, *Weedflower* presents the story of Sumiko, a 12-year-old Japanese American girl, whose family is relocated to an internment camp during World War II. The family must leave their thriving flower business and their home in California to go to an internment camp in

Poston, Arizona, with no chance to regain their life and livelihood. As the story unfolds, Sumiko is confronted with the humiliation of being ostracized by her classmates, the necessity of destroying family heirlooms that might mark her family as unpatriotic, and the ironic twist of having her brothers serve in the U.S. armed services even as the family is restricted to a camp. An additional element of this text involves the location of the internment camp itself – on the Colorado River Indian Reservation. The stark contrast of moving from California to Arizona is highlighted as is the tenuous relationship between the Japanese Americans and the Mohave people. Sumiko’s budding friendship with Frank, an astute Mohave teenager, is enlightening for both of them as they learn how to negotiate the challenges they face in respect to prejudice and stereotyping. Based on historical events, this story highlights how people learn from one another, and how their seemingly disparate circumstances may intertwine and benefit each other.

With a disquieting sense of inhumanity and compassion, *Weedflower* is a middle grade novel that leaves readers questioning the reasons for internment camps and the ways in which people are treated as a government attempts to balance its own fear and issues of safety. Sumiko and Frank are extraordinary characters who support readers in making connections to the biases found throughout history as well as in evaluating the changes or lack thereof that have occurred as a result of such circumstances in the past. A novel about the inevitability of change, the power of family, and the possibilities that exist when we are willing to explore the opportunities that come with change, *Weedflower* is an engaging novel that could be a vital part of identity literature for young people.

There are several ways to utilize this text. It could be part of a unit on what was happening in the United States during World War II along with *The Summer of My German Soldier* (Bette Greene, 1993), *Farewell to Manzanar* (James Houston & Jeanne W. Houston, 1983), *Journey to Topaz* (Yoshiko Uchida, 2004), *Remembering Manzanar* (Michael Cooper, 2002), and *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family* (Yoshiko Uchida, 1984). In respect to a unit about cross cultural convergences between different ethnic groups or geographical locations, *Weedflower* could be paired with *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Sherman Alexie, 2007),

American Born Chinese (Gene L. Yang, 2006), Dakota Dream (Michael Bennett, 1993), or The Real Plato Jones (Nina Bawden, 1993).

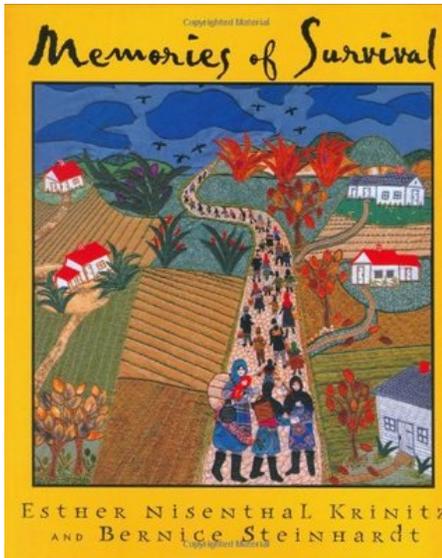
Cynthia Kadohata's father was held in the Poston internment camp during World War II, and it is his experiences from which she draws her story. Using her father's stories, as well as documentation of other Japanese Americans' experiences, Kadohata chronicles the effect of the government's internment policy during World War II. She also includes a brief historical note at the end of the text to inform readers of what happened to the internment camp at Poston and to the Native Americans and Japanese Americans who joined the military in spite of being alienated by U.S. citizens and U.S. governmental policies.

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Memories of Survival

Written by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz and Bernice Steinhardt
Hyperion, 2005, 30 pp.
ISBN: 9780786851263

Many stories of the Holocaust exist in literature for all ages, often leaving life-time impressions of the horrors of war and the memories of those whose families were destroyed. Told simplistically in words but with the detailed creativity of needlework, *Memories of Survival* will remain both an easily understood yet complex retelling of one family's experiences.

Separated from their family at the age of 15, Esther and her sister went into hiding with friends and later posed as Catholic farm

hands. The book is told through embroidered panels, Esther's words as found on each panel, and an added narrative by her daughter, Bernice. Esther created 36 pictures before her death after beginning this series at the age of 50, and they are organized into sections just as chapters within a book. These sections tell her story from a peaceful family existence, through survival of the Holocaust, to her journey to the United States as an adult. Her daughter's words provide just enough explanation to make the story continuous. Besides her own contributions to this book, Bernice's dedication to this project is also evident in her role as a founder of Art and Remembrance, a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to using the power of story and art to illuminate the effects of war, intolerance, and social injustice

The voice heard here is clearly that of a Holocaust survivor – a voice of determination and bravery shared through visual images and words. The historical accuracy of her life journey can be traced through accounts and other survivor stories. The story is a tribute to the individuals and events of the happy times in her life as well as a reminder of the horrific experience of seeing her family taken away and discovering later that they have been killed. The images are quite detailed with style and color used to create landscape and faces as well as scenes of defiance and emotional moments. One can imagine the hours of rethinking these images that preceded and continued throughout the creation of this book. Her daughter's comments maintain the authentic perspective with obvious personal insight and emotional involvement in this family story. These images join the chorus of voices striving to keep this memory alive and a reminder of those whose lives were forever changed through war and dictatorial leaders.

Readers of all ages can appreciate and connect readily to the human element of this story through its visual technique-that of using a comfortable needlework approach to tell a story in stark contrast to the comforts of home. This book can be grouped with other Holocaust stories told by those who experienced it, such as *The Hidden Child* (Isaac Millman, 2005), *The Cat with the Yellow Star: Coming of Age in Terezin* (Susan Rubin with Ela Weissberger, 2006), or *I Will Plant You a Lilac Tree: A Memoir of a Schindler's List Survivor* (Laura Hillman, 2005). *Memories of Survival* might also be paired with books that show the arts as integral to coping

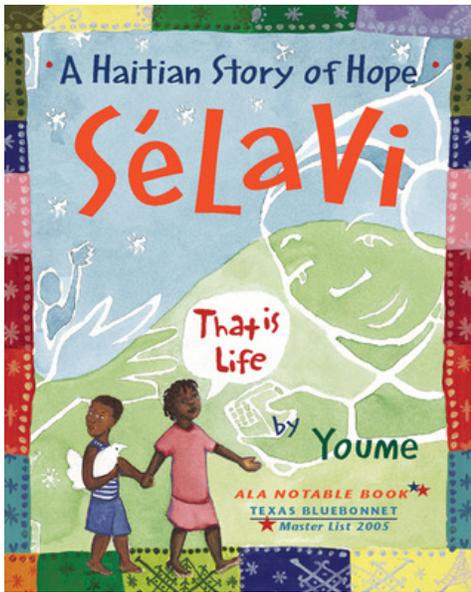
within various situations, such as Hitler's Canary (Sandi Toksvig, 2007) or The Harmonica (Tony Johnston, 2004).

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SéLavi

Written and illustrated by Youme Landowne
Cinco Puntos, 2004, 28 pp.
ISBN: 0-938317-84-9

This true story is set in an orphanage in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti called Lafanmi SéLavi. The orphanage was opened in 1986 by a priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who later became president of Haiti. The picture book opens with a glimpse of the political violence that leaves a Haitian child homeless. “Not so long ago and not so far away, people with guns could take a family, burn a house and disappear, leaving a small child alone in the world.” SéLavi, whose name means “that is life,” roams the streets looking for food, shelter, and a family. He finds refuge near a local marketplace where he meets Tifré, Toussaint, Jenti, Espri,

Yvette, and other children whose lives have also been affected by poverty, loss, and violence. These children become family to one another and other homeless children in Port-Au-Prince. Together, they help each other survive.

Although these small children experience homelessness and poverty, Landowne shows that children can be heroes and are able to solve their own problems. “I wanted to tell a story of a group of heroes.... Our country often focuses on the individual as a hero, but I was seeking a story with collective heroes, where the hero did not succeed on her or his own but in collaboration with others. The Haitian street children perfectly embody this idea” (www.netaid.org). The idea of collective heroes is effectively conveyed as the six homeless children form an allegiance and become a family committed to each other’s well being. They rise “early to look for work washing cars, carrying water, cleaning clothes, asking people for money or food,” and at the end of every day, they each come “home with something to share” so that there is food for everyone.

In addition to themes of unity and child heroes, other issues embedded in this book are hard work and ingenuity, values that strongly reflect the Haitian culture. It is quite common for children in Haiti to perform the kinds of daily chores mentioned even if they are not homeless. Landowne captures the resourcefulness of the Haitian people by showing how the children use a banyan tree as their home. This book also shows the benefits gained when adults support the efforts of children. After SéLavi and his friends are banned from their tree house by cruel officials, SéLavi seeks help from a church. He doesn’t just want help for himself, but seeks a place of refuge for himself and other homeless children. The church decides to be a “mighty river” and “build a house where street children who looked out for one another could live in safety, eat well, and even go to school.” Later, angry people set fire to the building, and the children are homeless again. The children stick together and eventually rebuild their home and establish a radio station where they can reach young people and speak out about their needs.

Landowne traveled to Port-au-Prince in 1997 and was invited to stay at the shelter described in the book. The illustrations capture life at the orphanage, as she recalls it, “festooned with colorful drawings of kids braiding hair, climbing tall banyan trees, and jump-roping” (netaid.org). Through the use of soft watercolors, she creates carefully sequenced illustrations, varied in scale and tone, to help tell the story. Photographs and lengthy endnotes from Landowne and Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat provide valuable background and historical information. For older readers, adult writer Edwidge Danticat contributes a powerful essay about her own Haitian childhood, her country’s proud history, and its desperate upheaval.

This book is a culturally authentic piece of literature that offers children “a realistic view of children whose lives are sometimes disconcerting” (Wysocki, 2007). It is filled with moral concepts and messages for readers, another aspect of the Haitian culture. Most of the stories shared in Haiti are told to teach strong morals or life lessons. A companion to this book is *A Taste of Salt: A Story of Modern Haiti* by Frances Temple (1992). This novel is told from the perspective of an adolescent orphan who lived at the orphanage.

Landowne wrote this book to bring an understanding about Haiti and inspire others to do what they can to help (www.netaid.org). Her work serves as a voice for the homeless children in Haiti and provides other children around the world with a realistic view of life in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The book is included in the 2005 ALA Notable Children’s Book List and the Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List.

Artist combines love of Haiti with lesson for all. Retrieved May 5, 2007, from http://www.netaid.org/inspiration/network-stories/youme_landowne.html

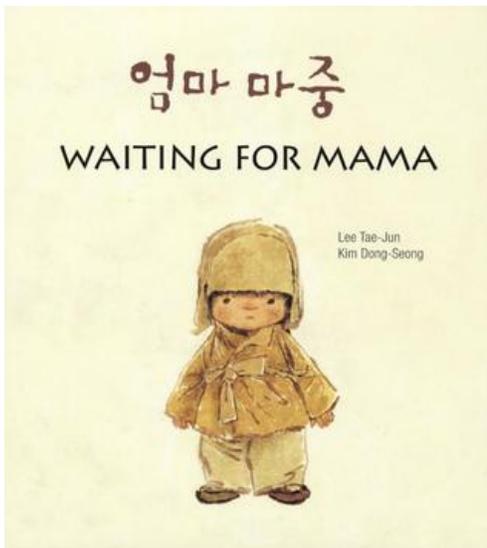
Wysocki, B.S. & Belden, C.J. [Review of the book *Sélavi*]. *School Library Journal*, American Library Association. Retrieved May 5, 2007, from <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/product-description/0938317954/sr=8-1/qid=11783889>

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Waiting for Mama

Written by Tae-Joon Lee

Illustrated by Dong-Sung Kim

North-South; bilingual edition, 2007

ISBN: 978-0735821439

This story takes place in the early 1900's in Korea when the country was under Japanese occupation. The focus on a young child waiting for his mother at a public transportation stop may not be familiar to children who come from cultures in which parents or babysitters always accompany them in public. The story does not have a complex plot. The simplified text and repeated images of a boy waiting at the station create the sense of a young protagonist being watched through a hidden camera.

The young boy goes to the platform of a streetcar station and waits for his mother to arrive. Every time a streetcar arrives, the boy asks the driver if his mother has come until one of the drivers tells him to remain in the safe area of the station. The boy stands still and waits, no longer asking the next drivers if his mother has come. Time passes and it gets darker and colder. The boy's nose grows redder. Suddenly, snow comes down and the story ends with the scene of a town in which the roofs of the houses are covered with snow. The ending does not seem to have the closure typically expected in picture books. It is not a happy or sad ending, but rather an ambiguous one. A book ending with a young child waiting for his parent in the evening without the promise of the parent's appearance seems unacceptable for an audience of young children. If you look closely the last page, however, things are not as they first appear. The small figures of the mother and child can be seen walking through the snow-covered scene.

Originally written in Korea, *Waiting for Mama*, *엄마 마중* [Umma Mah Joong], was published as a short story without illustrations in 1938. The illustrator of this picture book, Dong-Sung Kim, added his interpretation and details from his imagination. For instance, the young protagonist's gender was not clear in the original text (Kwon, 2003), nor was the illustrator's subtle interpretation that the mother arrives and walks home with the boy. Kwon (2003) says, "Readers don't know anything about the young boy, but make the presupposition that this is the boy's first experience waiting for his mom at the station based on his naïve question to the driver. The story can be hopeful or desperate depending on the reader's interpretation of the boy's situation" (p.189).

The story may be more powerful because the author does not describe what the boy is thinking or feeling when he keeps repeating the question, "Is my mom coming?" (Kwon, 2003). The author of the original short story, Tae-Joon Lee, wrote many orphan stories. Kwon (2003) says that the not-yet-arrived mom is a metaphor of the sovereignty of Korea and the waiting child is a metaphorical expression of Korea longing for independence from Japan. The illustrator, Dong-Sung Kim, is a well known artist who pursues the uniqueness of Korean illustration style in his works. Because of the simplicity of the story, Dong-Sung Kim's imagination plays significant roles for readers.



Despite the ending which causes concern in some cultures outside of Korea, this classic Korean story has been translated and published in other languages including German, French, and English. In Germany, a Korean/German bilingual book has been published, *Wann Kommt Mama? [When will mom come?]*. A French edition, *En Attendant Maman*, was published in 2007. In 2006, an edition was published in Australia as *Waiting for Mummy*, and in the United States as a Korean/English bilingual book called *Waiting for Mama* in 2007. This U.S. edition places Hangeul (the written Korean language) on the top line above the English translation, showing the American publisher's effort to highlight the origin of story.

The English translations of *Waiting for Mama* and *Waiting for Mummy* find ways to highlight that the mother does come in the ending in order to make the translation more culturally acceptable to readers in Australia and the United States. The Australian version pulls out the image of the mother and child walking down the path to put on the final copyright page and the U.S. version clearly states on the book jacket that the mother arrives and walks home with the boy. The Australian and American versions have distinctively different narratives of translation, yet similar considerations for an audience who is not familiar with this type of ambiguous story ending. The idea of leaving a young child alone without a guardian creates a tension for readers from these cultures. The two English translations reflect the strategies of publishers who negotiate between an audience's cultural resistance and the pleasure of reading an international children's book. Each finds a way to provide a textual indication to point readers to the internally embedded visual image of the young boy walking home with his mom.

This book can be read alongside other books originally published in South Korea and translated into English, particularly picture books that support deeper global connections through providing images of contemporary Korea. The universal theme of a child's relationship with a pet can be found in *My Cat Copies Me* (Yoon Kwon, 2007). The issues of self-esteem and gender can be found in *Something for School* (Hyun Young Lee, 2008). The themes of imagination and family are highlighted in *Minji's Salon* (Eun-hee Choung, 2008) and *The Zoo* (Suzy Lee, 2007). Children's curiosity about what pets do when the family is

away is found in *While We Were Out* (Ho Baek Lee, 2003). All of these books were originally published in South Korea and have been translated into English and published by Kane/Miller (www.kanemiller.com) in the United States.

Kwon, H. S. (2003). The relationship of mother and child in Tae-Jun Lee's children's books. *Changbi Review of Children's Literature*, 21.175-192.

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GERALDINE McCAUGHREAN
Carnegie Medal-Winning Author of *A Pack of Lies*



The White Darkness

Written by Geraldine McCaughrean

Harper/Tempest, 2005, 373 pp.

ISBN: 976-0-06-089035-3

“God sketched Antarctica, then erased most of it again, in the hope a better idea would strike Him. At the center is a blank whiteness where the planet isn’t finished. It’s the address for Nowhere.” (p. 74)

This realistic fiction novel focuses on Sym, a fourteen-year-old girl obsessed with Antarctica and the doomed Scott expedition of 1910. Like the quote that describes Sym’s first impression of “The Ice,” Sym feels a strong connection to the seemingly vacant geography that mirrors her identity. Dealing with the untimely

death of her father, the lack of peer acceptance, and a hearing impairment that accentuates her self-consciousness, Sym engages in a make-believe relationship with Captain Lawrence Oates, a.k.a. Titus, a member of the Scott expedition whose good looks and legendary valor had captured Sym’s imagination. Sym’s Uncle Victor, a family friend who has become a surrogate father, takes Sym to Antarctica on an unexpected expedition. From the beginning, the reader knows the quirky Uncle Victor has secret motives for this eco-adventure. Obsessed with discovering a geographic marvel, he jeopardizes Sym and their fellow travelers’ lives, and Sym finds herself on a dangerous journey of survival. The inner voice of Titus, which Sym has deemed imaginary, turns out to be her own as she discovers her inner strength and determination. The discovery of unknown personal territory is brilliantly juxtaposed with her uncle’s obsession with making history at all costs.

British-born author Geraldine McCaughrean is a master of the written word, and presents the reader with a riveting story of mystery, suspense, adventure, and unpredictable plot twists. A novel about a young English girl who talks to a dead explorer may seem like a strange premise, but it all makes complete sense in this adventure of courage and intrigue. It is no wonder this novel was awarded the prestigious Prinze medal by the American Library Association for outstanding young adult literature. It was originally published in England by Oxford University Press.

If part of the goal of reading literature about children and adolescents from other parts of the world is to simultaneously invite explorations of cultural differences and understandings of common dreams and value, this book can invite provocative discussions about journeys of discovery undertaken by characters across cultures in books, such as *La Línea* (Ana Jaramillo, 2006). Furthermore, it can be a springboard for inquiries into the perilous sacrifices individuals in literature and history have made when obsessed in the spirit of exploration and discovery. This book could be paired with adventure stories like *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead

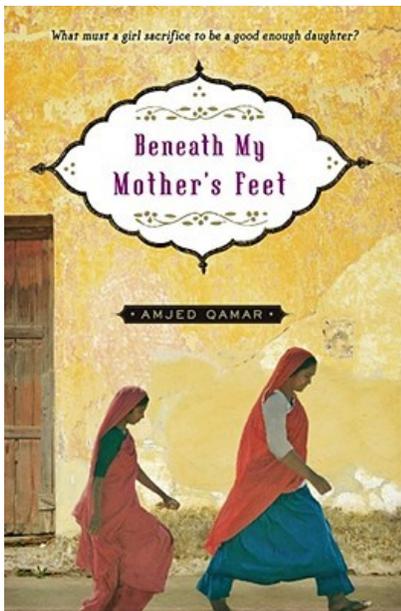
George (1972), *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen (1987), *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer (1997), or *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson (2001). It could also be included in a text set of coming of age stories like *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999), *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan (2000), or *Keeper of the Night*, Kimberly Willis Holt (2003).

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Beneath My Mother's Feet

Written by Amjed Qamar
Atheneum, 2008, 198 pp.
ISBN: 978-1416947288

Nazia, a fourteen-year-old girl living in Karachi, Pakistan, is secure in her life as a student, a sister, a friend and most of all as a daughter. She belongs to an uneducated working class urban family, where the father, the sole breadwinner, works long hours as a laborer and struggles to put food on the table and the mother augments the income by sewing clothes for the richer ladies of the society. Nazia's future is safe because she is betrothed to a cousin and will be married within a year. Her mother has collected her jaheez (dowry) slowly and painstakingly until it is almost complete. Nazia loves studying and goes to school

regularly where she excels. This secure existence is shattered when her father is in an accident at his place of work and refuses to go back even though he is not hurt badly, her older brother robs them of her dowry and runs away, and her uncle/father-in-law refuses to accept her as the dowry is gone. The responsibility of becoming the breadwinner falls on the women of the house and she and her mother are forced to approach a wealthier household in Karachi to become Masi's (cleaning ladies) to keep a roof over their heads and feed themselves as well as the younger members of the family. Worst of all she is required to quit school to perform menial duties that are embarrassing for her. Nazia, however, does not let this situation overcome her optimism for a better future.

This novel illuminates the universal concepts of struggle for survival and sacrifice, and elaborates on the impact of women's influence in a patriarchal society. The men in general, women of the rich households, and the mother of a secondary protagonist are presented as villainous. This story articulates Nazia's feelings of mistrust for the men in her family through the unfolding of the actions of the story. The reflection of mothers throughout the sequence of events is negative. The author questions the concept of motherhood in Islam. Islamic thought on women, specifically mothers, is that of extreme respect and veneration, to the degree that paradise exists under the feet of a mother. Both of the mothers in the book, on the other hand, take advantage of their children by not taking care of their children's needs and forcing their children to work – Nazia's mother by making her leave school and work and the other mother by making all of her very young children toil at different households where she visits once a month to collect the fruits of their labor. The author, Amjed Qamar, tells the story as an insider who might have witnessed such events unfold. The coming of age of a young girl in such extraordinary circumstances is narrated believably.

Throughout the narrative religion has a presence of being ingrained in the very fabric of the protagonist's life. Nazia's faith and her internal integrity seem to stem from her religious beliefs, which are unshakable even after going through so much, to the degree of losing everything she holds dear. Obedience to her mother's will also reveals conviction in her religious values. She is

depicted as performing her prayers of the day after Wuzu (ritualistic cleansing before prayers), as a way of life. She awaits Azan (call to prayers) and demonstrates guilt if her innumerable chores cause her to miss any of her prayers. Islamic way of greetings, exclamation, and respect at the mention of Prophet Mohammad's (SAW) name are also frequent within the dialogue of the various characters. Nazia's resistance to her present circumstances and her argument about education as necessary for a better way of life are also her rights under Islam and are ultimately acknowledged by her family.

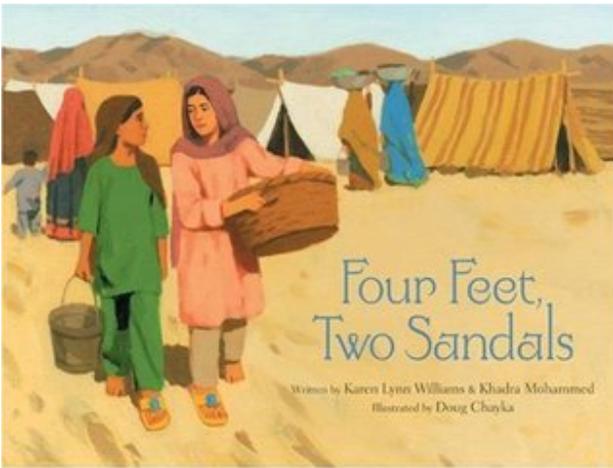
The story touches on aspects of Pakistani culture that might be true in some instances but cannot be taken as representative of the whole of the society. While attention is given to women's empowerment and the power of choice and education, this book reinforces stereotypes of early marriages, the requirement for dowry, and child labor in Pakistani/Muslim societies. The intended audience in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries is exposed to a narrow diversity within Pakistani society, which encompasses only the rich and the very poor and ignores the middle class. It is authentic in the incorporation of religion in everyday life but the author has fashioned an extremely pessimistic portrayal of men and mothers, which negates the religious foundations. This novel can be read along with research on ways of life of Pakistani people and Islamic religion. Variations of some of the same thematic threads can be found in other novels set in Pakistan by authors outside of the culture such as *Iqbal* (Francesco D'Adamo, 2003), *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind; Haveli; The House of the Djinn; and Under the Persimmon Tree*, (Suzanne Staples 1989, 1995, 2008, & 2005).

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Four Feet, Two Sandals

Written by Karen Lynn Williams & Khadra Mohammed

Illustrated by Doug Chayka

Eerdmans, 2007

ISBN: 978-0-8028-5296-0

Ten-year-old Lina and her mother live in a refugee camp on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border while they wait for the opportunity to immigrate to America. When workers bring clothing to the camp, Lina manages to grab a new yellow sandal with a blue flower. She slips it on her foot, the first shoes she's worn in two

years, while she looks for the other one. She finds the matching sandal on the foot of another young girl, Feroza. Feroza sees Lina, turns, and leaves with her one sandal. The two girls meet the next day at the stream and after some initial tension over the sandals, Lina suggests they share them, each wearing them on alternate days. Lina comments, "Four feet, two sandals." Lina and Feroza soon become close friends. They learn about the struggles and tragedies they have each experienced and share their hopes and dreams. When Lina's family hears they will be leaving for America, Lina tells Feroza to keep the sandals because her mother has bought her shoes for the trip. But, as Lina boards the bus, Feroza runs up and gives her back a sandal. "It is good to remember. Four feet, two sandals," she says.

This touching story is based on Khadra Mohammed's experiences working with refugees in Peshawar on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The two authors were inspired to write the book when a young girl they were working with at a refugee center in Pittsburgh asked why there weren't any books about children like her. As readers get to know Lina and Feroza they learn the realities of life for children in refugee camps, from daily chores to schools only boys can attend to struggles to obtain the supplies they need. It is a powerful story of friendship and overcoming separation and loss that will linger in readers' memories. An Author's Note gives added information about refugees.

Doug Chayka's illustrations realistically depict the culture, camp conditions, and emotions of the refugees. The desert setting and camp are painted in muted earth tones that convey the dullness of the girls' lives while the characters are dressed in bright colors. Their bright blues, greens, and pinks make them stand out, highlighting their humanness and hopes and bringing to light the realities of life in refugee camps. Chayka's use of quick broad brush strokes in simplified sketches that lack details reflect the simple and temporary life of the refugees who long for a more permanent life.

In a text set on the experiences of refugees and their inner strength and hope, this book would work well with *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Mary Williams, 2005), the story of orphaned boys who travel hundreds of miles to safety after a civil war breaks out in their home country of Sudan. *The Whispering Cloth: A Refugee's Story* (Pegi D. Shea, 1996), the story of a Hmong refugee girl who creates a pa'ndau, a traditional story cloth, to document her personal story and memories, would also work well in this text set.

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